

BOBBY MARABLE,)
)
Plaintiff,)
)
VS.) No. 18-1167-JDT-cgc
)
GIBSON COUNTY CORRECTIONAL)
COMPLEX, ET AL.,)
)
Defendants.)

On August 24, 2018, Plaintiff Bobby Marable, who is incarcerated at the Gibson County Correctional Complex in Trenton, Tennessee, filed a *pro se* civil complaint and a motion to proceed *in forma pauperis*. (ECF Nos. 1 & 2.) The Court issued an order on August 27, 2018, granting leave to proceed *in forma pauperis* and assessing the civil filing fee pursuant to the Prison Litigation Reform Act (PLRA), 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(a)-(b). (ECF No. 4.) The Clerk shall record the Defendants as the Gibson County Correctional Complex (GCCC) and Officer Blake Copel.¹

Marable alleges in the complaint that on August 5, 2018, he was waiting in line to receive his medication. As Marable waited to sign the log book, Defendant Copel allegedly ignored him even though he was standing directly in front of Copel and made eye contact with Copel several

¹ The correct spelling of this Defendant's last name is unclear because it is spelled three different ways in the complaint, as "Copel," "Copels" and Coples."

times. (ECF No. 1 at 1.) Marable then returned to his cell in J-pod. As Marable stood by his cell door, Copel allegedly assaulted him by grabbing him under the armpit and shoving him inside the cell; Copel then slammed the cell door. (*Id.* at 1-2.) Shortly afterward, Marable allegedly was told to pack his belongings because he was being moved to I-pod, the “23 & 1 lock down pod.”² He alleges that putting him in lock-up was unfair. Marable states that his claims are for assault, unfair treatment and harassment. He does not specify the relief sought.

The Court is required to screen prisoner complaints and to dismiss any complaint, or any portion thereof, if the complaint—

- (1) is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted; or
- (2) seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief.

28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b); *see also* 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B).

In assessing whether the complaint in this case states a claim on which relief may be granted, the standards under Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6), as stated in *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 677-79 (2009), and in *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555-57 (2007), are applied. *Hill v. Lappin*, 630 F.3d 468, 470-71 (6th Cir. 2010). “Accepting all well-pleaded allegations in the complaint as true, the Court ‘consider[s] the factual allegations in [the] complaint to determine if they plausibly suggest an entitlement to relief.’” *Williams v. Curtin*, 631 F.3d 380, 383 (6th Cir. 2011) (quoting *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 681). “[P]leadings that . . . are no more than conclusions, are not entitled to the assumption of truth. While legal conclusions can provide the framework of a

² Marable alleges the “assault was over Inmate Bobby Marable not signing the medical log book. Before the assault [sic] occurred [sic] Inmate Marable did sign the medical log book.” (*Id.* at 2.) This statement is not clear, but Marable may be asserting that he did actually sign the log book, but Copel mistakenly thought he had not signed it.

complaint, they must be supported by factual allegations.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 679; *see also Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555 n.3 (“Rule 8(a)(2) still requires a ‘showing,’ rather than a blanket assertion, of entitlement to relief. Without some factual allegation in the complaint, it is hard to see how a claimant could satisfy the requirement of providing not only ‘fair notice’ of the nature of the claim, but also ‘grounds’ on which the claim rests.”).

“A complaint can be frivolous either factually or legally.” *Hill*, 630 F.3d at 470 (citing *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989)). “Any complaint that is legally frivolous would *ipso facto* fail to state a claim upon which relief can be granted.” *Id.* (citing *Neitzke*, 490 U.S. at 328-29).

Whether a complaint is factually frivolous under §§ 1915A(b)(1) and 1915(e)(2)(B)(i) is a separate issue from whether it fails to state a claim for relief. Statutes allowing a complaint to be dismissed as frivolous give judges not only the authority to dismiss a claim based on an indisputably meritless legal theory, but also the unusual power to pierce the veil of the complaint’s factual allegations and dismiss those claims whose factual contentions are clearly baseless. Unlike a dismissal for failure to state a claim, where a judge must accept all factual allegations as true, a judge does not have to accept “fantastic or delusional” factual allegations as true in prisoner complaints that are reviewed for frivolousness.

Id. at 471 (citations and internal quotation marks omitted).

“*Pro se* complaints are to be held ‘to less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers,’ and should therefore be liberally construed.” *Williams*, 631 F.3d at 383 (quoting *Martin v. Overton*, 391 F.3d 710, 712 (6th Cir. 2004)). *Pro se* litigants, however, are not exempt from the requirements of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. *Wells v. Brown*, 891 F.2d 591, 594 (6th Cir. 1989); *see also Brown v. Matauszak*, 415 F. App’x 608, 612, 613 (6th Cir. Jan. 31, 2011) (affirming dismissal of *pro se* complaint for failure to comply with “unique pleading requirements” and stating “a court cannot ‘create a claim which [a plaintiff] has not spelled out in his pleading’” (quoting *Clark v. Nat’l Travelers Life Ins. Co.*, 518 F.2d 1167, 1169 (6th Cir. 1975))); *Payne v.*

Sec’y of Treas., 73 F. App’x 836, 837 (6th Cir. 2003) (affirming *sua sponte* dismissal of complaint pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2) and stating, “[n]either this court nor the district court is required to create Payne’s claim for her”); *cf. Pliler v. Ford*, 542 U.S. 225, 231 (2004) (“District judges have no obligation to act as counsel or paralegal to *pro se* litigants.”); *Young Bok Song v. Gipson*, 423 F. App’x 506, 510 (6th Cir. 2011) (“[W]e decline to affirmatively require courts to ferret out the strongest cause of action on behalf of *pro se* litigants. Not only would that duty be overly burdensome, it would transform the courts from neutral arbiters of disputes into advocates for a particular party. While courts are properly charged with protecting the rights of all who come before it, that responsibility does not encompass advising litigants as to what legal theories they should pursue.”).

Marable’s complaint presumably is filed pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, which provides:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory or the District of Columbia, subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress, except that in any action brought against a judicial officer for an act or omission taken in such officer’s judicial capacity, injunctive relief shall not be granted unless a declaratory decree was violated or declaratory relief was unavailable. For the purposes of this section, any Act of Congress applicable exclusively to the District of Columbia shall be considered to be a statute of the District of Columbia.

To state a claim under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege two elements: (1) a deprivation of rights secured by the “Constitution and laws” of the United States (2) committed by a defendant acting under color of state law. *Adickes v. S.H. Kress & Co.*, 398 U.S. 144, 150 (1970).

Marable’s claims against the GCCC and any claims he may be asserting against Defendant Copel in his official capacity are construed as claims against Gibson County. When a § 1983 claim is made against a municipality or county, the court must analyze two distinct issues: (1) whether

the plaintiff's harm was caused by a constitutional violation; and (2) if so, whether the municipality or county is responsible for that violation. *Collins v. City of Harker Heights, Tex.*, 503 U.S. 115, 120 (1992). The second issue is dispositive of Marable's claims against Gibson County.

A local government "cannot be held liable *solely* because it employs a tortfeasor—or, in other words, a municipality cannot be held liable under § 1983 on a *respondeat superior* theory." *Monell v. Dep't. of Soc. Servs.*, 436 U.S. 658, 691 (1978); *see also Searcy v. City of Dayton*, 38 F.3d 282, 286 (6th Cir. 1994); *Berry v. City of Detroit*, 25 F.3d 1342, 1345 (6th Cir. 1994). A municipality cannot be held responsible for a constitutional deprivation unless there is a direct causal link between a municipal policy or custom and the alleged constitutional deprivation. *Monell*, 436 U.S. at 691-92; *Deaton v. Montgomery Cnty., Ohio*, 989 F.2d 885, 889 (6th Cir. 1993). To demonstrate municipal liability, a plaintiff "must (1) identify the municipal policy or custom, (2) connect the policy to the municipality, and (3) show that his particular injury was incurred due to execution of that policy." *Alkire v. Irving*, 330 F.3d 802, 815 (6th Cir. 2003) (citing *Garner v. Memphis Police Dep't*, 8 F.3d 358, 364 (6th Cir. 1993)). "[T]he touchstone of 'official policy' is designed 'to distinguish acts of the *municipality* from acts of *employees* of the municipality, and thereby make clear that municipal liability is limited to action for which the municipality is actually responsible.'" *City of St. Louis v. Praprotnik*, 485 U.S. 112, 138 (1988) (quoting *Pembaur v. Cincinnati*, 475 U.S. 469, 479-80 (1986)). The complaint does not allege that Marable suffered any injury arising from an unconstitutional policy or custom of Gibson County.

Marable's allegation that his placement in the lock-up pod was "unfair" is insufficient to state a due process claim. A Fourteenth Amendment procedural due process claim depends upon the existence of a constitutionally cognizable liberty or property interest with which the state has

interfered. *Kentucky Dep't of Corr. v. Thompson*, 490 U.S. 454, 460 (1989); *Pusey v. City of Youngstown*, 11 F.3d 652, 656 (6th Cir. 1993).

Prison disciplinary procedures do not give rise to a protected liberty interest unless the restrictions imposed constitute an “atypical and significant hardship on the inmate in relation to the ordinary incidents of prison life.” *Sandin v. Conner*, 515 U.S. 472, 484 (1995). Confinement to punitive segregation, the loss of package privileges, fines, and restitution do not constitute an atypical and significant hardship in the context of prison life. *See Freeman v. Rideout*, 808 F.2d 949, 951 (2d Cir. 1986). Marable does not allege that his confinement in lock-up resulted in the loss of any sentence credits or lasted for a significant period of time. *See Sarmiento v. Hemingway*, 93 F. App'x 65, 66 (6th Cir. 2004) (“Generally, unless placement in disciplinary confinement is accompanied by a withdrawal of good time credits or is for a significant period of time that presents an unusual hardship on the inmate, no interest to remain free of disciplinary confinement will be found in the case.”)

Marable also alleges that he was harassed by Defendant Copel. However, he does not include any facts describing the alleged harassment or the context in which it occurred. Therefore, this allegation also fails to state a claim.

Marable's allegation that Copel grabbed him by the arm and shoved him into the cell is construed as a claim of excessive force. However, Marable does not allege that he suffered any actual injury as a result of being shoved into the cell. Whether Marable is a pre-trial detainee whose protection against excessive force is based on the Fourteenth Amendment or a convicted prisoner whose protection stems from the Eighth Amendment, the extent of injury is a factor in determining whether the force used was excessive. *Kingsley v. Hendrickson*, 135 S. Ct. 2466, 2473 (2015) (Fourteenth Amendment); *Wilkins v. Gaddy*, 559 U.S. 34, 37-38 (2010) (Eighth

Amendment); *Hudson v. McMillian*, 503 U.S. 1, 9-10 (1992) (“The Eighth Amendment’s prohibition of ‘cruel and unusual’ punishments necessarily excludes from constitutional recognition *de minimis* uses of physical force, provided that the use of force is not of a sort repugnant to the conscience of mankind.” (citations and internal quotation marks omitted)).

In any event, Marable’s failure to allege that he suffered any physical injury requires dismissal of all of his claims pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(e), which provides that “[n]o Federal civil action may be brought by a prisoner . . . while in custody without a prior showing of physical injury or the commission of a sexual act.”

For all of the foregoing reasons, the complaint is subject to dismissal in its entirety.

The Sixth Circuit has held that a district court may allow a prisoner to amend his complaint to avoid a *sua sponte* dismissal under the PLRA. *LaFountain v. Harry*, 716 F.3d 944, 951 (6th Cir. 2013); *see also Brown v. R.I.*, 511 F. App’x 4, 5 (1st Cir. 2013) (per curiam) (“Ordinarily, before dismissal for failure to state a claim is ordered, some form of notice and an opportunity to cure the deficiencies in the complaint must be afforded.”). Leave to amend is not required where a deficiency cannot be cured. *Gonzalez-Gonzalez v. United States*, 257 F.3d 31, 37 (1st Cir. 2001) (“This does not mean, of course, that every *sua sponte* dismissal entered without prior notice to the plaintiff automatically must be reversed. If it is crystal clear that . . . amending the complaint would be futile, then a *sua sponte* dismissal may stand.”); *Curley v. Perry*, 246 F.3d 1278, 1284 (10th Cir. 2001) (“We agree with the majority view that *sua sponte* dismissal of a meritless complaint that cannot be salvaged by amendment comports with due process and does not infringe the right of access to the courts.”). In this case, the Court concludes that leave to amend is not warranted.

In conclusion, the Court DISMISSES Marable's complaint for failure to state a claim on which relief can be granted, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) and 1915A(b)(1). Leave to amend is DENIED.

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §1915(a)(3), the Court must also consider whether an appeal by Marable in this case would be taken in good faith. The good faith standard is an objective one. *Coppedge v. United States*, 369 U.S. 438, 445 (1962). The test for whether an appeal is taken in good faith is whether the litigant seeks appellate review of any issue that is not frivolous. *Id.* It would be inconsistent for a district court to determine that a complaint should be dismissed prior to service on the Defendants, but has sufficient merit to support an appeal *in forma pauperis*. See *Williams v. Kullman*, 722 F.2d 1048, 1050 n.1 (2d Cir. 1983). The same considerations that lead the Court to dismiss this case for failure to state a claim also compel the conclusion that an appeal would not be taken in good faith. Therefore, it is CERTIFIED, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §1915(a)(3), that any appeal in this matter by Marable would not be taken in good faith.

The Court must also address the assessment of the \$505 appellate filing fee if Marable nevertheless appeals the dismissal of this case. A certification that an appeal is not taken in good faith does not affect an indigent prisoner plaintiff's ability to take advantage of the installment procedures contained in § 1915(b). See *McGore v. Wrigglesworth*, 114 F.3d 601, 610-11 (6th Cir. 1997), *partially overruled on other grounds by LaFountain*, 716 F.3d at 951. *McGore* sets out specific procedures for implementing the PLRA, §§ 1915(a)-(b). Therefore, Marable is instructed that if he wishes to take advantage of the installment procedures for paying the appellate filing fee, he must comply with the procedures set out in the PLRA and *McGore* by filing an updated *in forma pauperis* affidavit and a current, certified copy of his inmate trust account for the six months immediately preceding the filing of the notice of appeal.

For analysis under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g) of future filings, if any, by Marable, this is the first dismissal of one of his cases as frivolous or for failure to state a claim. This “strike” shall take effect when judgment is entered. *Coleman v. Tollefson*, 135 S. Ct. 1759, 1763-64 (2015).

The Clerk is directed to prepare a judgment.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

s/ **James D. Todd**
JAMES D. TODD
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE